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November 27, 1957

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POLITICAL

1. No Sign of Improvement

There was no evidence of improving political stability. Examples of deterioration were the resignation of the Electoral Tribunal, the lack of a quorum in the Congress, the vacillation of the Supreme Court, and the failure of the Government to take positive action to halt an imminent railway strike. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: The widespread belief continues that a coup will intervene before elections January 19. The absence of strong leadership encourages factionalism and plotting. On the other hand, the two strongest political personalities of the moment, Mario Mendez Montenegro and General Ydigoras, appear to have more to gain from elections than they do from attempting a coup. Furthermore, the several plots of other persons tend to cancel one another by the fluctuating, interlocking and uncertain loyalties which they breed. Weak as the Flores Avendaño Government may be, it may well be stronger than any force which can be organized against it. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

2. MM Warmly Received in Puerto Barrios

In his campaign trip to Puerto Barrios and Livingston, Mario Mendez Montenegro received a more enthusiastic ovation than anyone else has received in recent years. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: This is an area in which the PR is known to be strong. Nevertheless, the warmth of MMM's reception there points once again to the possibility of a PR victory on January 19 if anti-communist votes are divided among two or more candidates. The PR currently claims more than 60,000 members and is organizing affiliates in all parts of the country. (CONFIDENTIAL)

3. Electoral Tribunal Resigns

The three members of the Electoral Tribunal resigned November 25. In their letters of resignation all made clear that they considered intolerable the pressures which were brought on them to register the Partido [illegible]ucionario. They agreed to continue to function until [illegible] replacements are named.

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No one of them questioned the PR's right to registration. They simply pointed out that the Party had refused to submit a new application for registration and that they felt they could not act on the original application by reason of an adverse ruling concerning it by the Supreme Court.

The PR immediately announced it would agree to submit a new application for registration. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: As municipal elections are scheduled throughout the country for December 1, the reaction to the resignations was one of consternation. Attempts were immediately made from all sides to persuade the members to reconsider. If they do not reconsider, it can be expected that Congress, which appoints two members, and the President, who appoints one member, will have difficulty finding anyone else to serve. The main block to PR registration has arisen from the fact that the Gonzalez Government had stated that most of the officers and over 1000 members of the PR were on the National Security Agency's list of persons who had participated in communist activities. Until this stigma is removed the Electoral Tribunal cannot legally register the PR. This week a step was taken towards resolving the impasse when the Minister of Interior removed from the National Security Agency's list the officers of the PR who had been named by the Gonzalez Government as having been on it. The problem of the 1000 odd PR members still on the list has yet to be resolved. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

4. Supreme Court Declines to Pass Judgement on Congress

Redención having filed a petition for a writ of amparo, in which it alleged the unconstitutionality of Congress' action in delaying new elections until January 19, the Supreme Court resolved merely that it did not consider that the law of amparo contemplated recourse against acts of Congress. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: The precedent seems also to dispose of Ortiz Pasarelli's petition for amparo. He has alleged the unconstitutionality of Congress' action in annulling the October 20 elections. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

5. Colonel Enrique Ardon to Appear on January 19 Ballot

On November 22 the Electoral Tribunal legally inscribed Col. J. Enrique Ardon as the candidate of the Partido Unión Liberal Evolucionista for the January 19 presidential elections. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: Col. Ardon is the first and only candidate to date (November 26) to be inscribed for the new campaign. Redención is holding its nominating convention today and will undoubtedly submit General Trujillo's name to the Electoral Tribunal without delay. Retired Colonel Ardon, who was formerly manager of the National Lottery, tried to run in the October 20 presidential elections but

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was unable to do so because his party did not register his candidacy in time. Ardon is an anti-communist whose political views are somewhat right of center. He does not have a large following and with his present political backing could not hope to get more than 25000 votes and will probably get considerably less.

C. Two Exiles are re-Expelled

Major Marco Antonio Franco Chacón and Dr. Clodoveo Torres Moss, Guatemalan exiles who returned clandestinely, were expelled again to El Salvador on the ground that being communists who left Guatemala before the constitution became effective, they fall under the provisions of Transitory Article No. 6 of the Constitution. Two other exiles, Col. Carlos Alamán Sandoval and Octavio Augusto Salguero Galvez, who also entered illegally, were released on bail after the Government stated they were not communists. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: The Flores Avendaño Government has authorized the return to Guatemala of 30 exiles and has apparently ignored the unauthorized return of some others. The thirty who were permitted to return legally were not covered by Transitory Article No. 6 of the Constitution. Most of them were exiled after the constitution became effective. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY)

7. Railroad Strike Begins

On November 23 International Railways of Central America was presented with general strike threat unless it agreed within three days to demands of Sindicato de Acción y Mejoramiento (SAMF) for establishment company commissaries, fifty percent wage increase and signature labor contract within 45 days. IRCA rejected SAMF demands as economically impossible. During Labor Ministry-SAMF-IRCA meetings which continued until 3:00 a.m. today (November 27) union refused to modify demands. At this writing (9:00 a.m.) strike is getting under way. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: IRCA has presented Government with letter requesting physical protection for laborers who wish to work and protection for railway property. There is possibility Government will "militarize" the railway. This should mean little more than the presence of Army personnel on the premises. IRCA believes strike is almost wholly politically motivated, with PR registration as SAMF goal. However, discussions on collective contract have been under way since April, with agreement apparently not in sight. (OFFICIAL USE ONLY).

FOR THE AMBASSADOR:

William E. Connett, Jr.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: November 27, 1957

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: Candidacy of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Roberto Alejos A., of Guatemala
ARA - Assistant Secretary R. R. Rubottom, Jr.
MID - Mr. C. Allan Stewart, Acting Director, Office of Middle American Affairs
Mr. Bayard King, Guatemala Desk Officer

COPIES TO: ARA (2), IRC (2), Amembassy Guatemala

Mr. Alejos had a letter of introduction from Mr. Spruille Braden to Assistant Secretary Rubottom.

Mr. Alejos identified himself as a coffee grower and a strong supporter of General Ydigoras. After a forceful and lengthy statement of General Ydigoras' qualifications for the Presidency of Guatemala, Mr. Alejos complained of what he termed a "negative" attitude toward the General by the American Embassy in Guatemala. He said that in his estimation this attitude had recently changed, but that it was not justified.

Mr. Rubottom said that he had the utmost confidence in Ambassador Sparks and the Embassy in Guatemala, and that he felt Mr. Alejos was mistaken in his assessment of the Embassy's attitude toward General Ydigoras. He said that the Department and the Embassy did not have a negative attitude toward any Presidential candidate in Guatemala. In keeping with the United States policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, the Department and the Embassy were neutral insofar as the various anti-Communist candidates were concerned. The Department was not "against" General Ydigoras nor any other of these candidates, neither was it supporting any one of them. On the other hand, the Department was strongly opposed to candidates with a Communist taint and continues to be so.

At this point Mr. Rubottom had to leave the meeting for another appointment, and Mr. Alejos for some time continued to stress the qualifications of General Ydigoras. He said the General was strongly anti-Communist, enjoyed the support of the majority of the Guatemalan people, and was the only person who could lead Guatemala out of the present chaos back to stability. He said that Colonel Enrique Peralta and Colonel Jose Luis Cruz-Salazar had no chance of winning a Presidential election in Guatemala, and that the MDN was finished as a political force. Mr. Alejos continued in this vein for some time. He showed Messrs. Rubottom, Stewart and King a letter from General Ydigoras appointing him (Alejos) as a representative for General Ydigoras' "Cause".

ARA:MID:BKing:bg:mpt

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